



February 27th, 2023

Re: Black and Brown United in Action testimony in support of SB 1095

Dear Senator Winfield, Senator McCrory, Representative Leeper, Representative Currey and members of the Education Committee,

We are Black and Brown United In Action, a grassroots organization which focuses on immigrant rights, worker's rights, women's rights, and all matters which adversely affect the lives of Black and Brown people in New Haven, Connecticut and are testifying in support of SB 1095 An Act Concerning School Resource Officers. It is very expensive to poor in Connecticut, the people need more care, not cops especially in schools.

Education is often viewed as the great equalizer in society. Among lower- and middle-income households, white families accrue four times as much wealth as Black families, and three times as much wealth as Brown families, according to a Pew Research Center study. Interestingly, less than 12% of students in the United States are required to take a personal finance class to graduate high school and that gap is even wider for Black and Brown students, of which, only 7.4% are required to take a financial literacy course before graduating high school. Black and Brown students also face socio-economic barriers that contribute to the racial gap in financial literacy and are more likely to be first-generation college students. Consequently, Black and Brown students may face greater pressure to work while they are studying to support themselves or their families. This additional pressure, and the fact that they cannot concentrate fully on their academics, decreases their grades and, eventually, the resources they have to achieve financial independence. This creates fewer resources to achieve financial independence and makes it challenging to save and invest money.

As you are aware, the organization of schools and how students are engaged in their learning are of critical importance for the educational achievement of students across ethnic and racial groups. Educational disparities are evident in markers of low academic performance and graduation rates, as well as the underrepresentation of Black and Brown students in gifted and talented educational programs, and psychological theory speaks to how to cultivate academic talent across the range of students in schools. The psychology of individual and group differences can inform our understanding of the educational implications of important forms of human difference and exceptionality in educational systems.

Generally, schools with larger Black and Brown student populations are more likely to have police officers in the halls, metal detectors and security cameras, making the students more likely to be stunned, assaulted or pepper-sprayed by police. School police do not keep students safe. They do not prevent or end school based shootings. We cannot continue to go back to the knee-jerk reactionary response of more policing. We should be building a positive school climate and investing robustly in the types of support that young Black and Brown people need in order to feel safe, whole, affirmed and supported in their school environment. The school resource officer debate has many sides. This debate comes at a time when communities and police have increasingly strained relations due to police shootings and other negative encounters.

This bill proposal comes after cities such as Alexandria, Virginia, Washington and Milwaukee wrestled with whether to have School Resource Officers (SROs) or regular police officers on site. Two studies conducted in 2021 by researchers at Hamline University and Metropolitan State University in Minnesota and the University at Albany found that school resource officers did not necessarily prevent school shootings. The University at Albany study found that while SROs did help reduce certain kinds of violence, their presence in schools also intensified suspensions, expulsions, police referrals, and arrests of students and Black students were over twice as likely to face these forms of discipline compared to white students. Passious Green, a Black parent from Virginia Beach, Va. felt uncomfortable knowing that police were in schools due to the stigma of being Black and “Because I would know that my children are not going to be walking around with a target on their back from the police on top of having to deal with a possible school shooting.”

The larger conversation about the role of SROs or police officers assigned to schools and whether they add to school safety has been a topic of debate across the country since George Floyd’s death in 2020. Right here in Connecticut, we have endured several cases of excessive force as demonstrated by the Paul Witherspoon, Stephanie Washington and Randy Cox cases against the Hamden Police Department (HPD), New Haven Police Department (NHPD) and Yale Police Department (YPD) respectively. In fact, despite the public outcry after Witherspoon and Washington’s encounters with NHPD, YPD and HPD, the footage of Cox’s ‘rough ride’ courtesy of NHPD, sadly shows we still have a lot of work still to do to reduce use of force locally.

Do you remember your ‘school days’? Did you have fun, meet friends and dream? What do most Black and Brown students get from school right now besides friends, education and maybe a meal for the day? You also get mentorship, guidance and empowerment which are the core components of education. A police officer is not a resource, a social worker, or health support staff or special education support staff are resources. Food pantries, walk in clinics and after school programs are resources. As if it was not bad enough that automated cashiers, gentrification and cronyism is taking away income from Black and Brown communities, now Black and Brown parents have to handle their child being targeted, stigmatized and badly treated because instead of support resources and personnel because some of us in Connecticut believe funding police is worth more than basic essential needs, and view it as the answer to everything. In truth, over policing and this method of rebuilding the school to prison pipeline is modern slavery and a clear illustration of White Supremacy. As stated by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), “yet in those schools with a significant lack of health support staff, law enforcement presence is flourishing. Many states reported two to three times as many police officers in schools as social workers. Five states reported more police officers in schools than nurses”. We are asking for legislators to actually recognize Black and Brown lives and enforce Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity, by supporting SB 1095.

In closing, as you listen to the testimonies being shared, we urge you to consider the viability of democracy when someone who does not speak English as a first language or needs communication support services such as sign language is only afforded 3 mins to share their testimony. Kindly acknowledge that access to healthcare includes being able to effectively and efficiently share thought, which will prove difficult if there is a lack of resources and time, both of which can feel like a cage to someone who is only trying to share their story. We appreciate the time, effort and courage which you put into your work to represent us, and are asking for you to consider how improving language and time access will increase our participation and support of your endeavors of improving our communities during the legislative process.

With appreciation,  
Black and Brown United in Action